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PAPERS ON SCHOOL ISSUES OF THE DAY. X.

ORGANIZATION AND SYSTEM

—VS.—

ORIGINALITY AND INDIVIDUALITY

On the Part of Teacher and Pupil.

—BY—

HENRY S^UABIN,

State Superintendent, Iowa.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION, AT ST. PAUL, MINN., JULY, 1890.

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ORGANIZATION AND SYSTEM VS. ORIGINALITY AND INDIVIDUALITY ON THE PART OF TEACHER AND PUPIL.

HENRY SABIN, STATE SUPERINTENDENT, IOWA.

(A paper read before the National Educational Association, at St. Paul, Minn., July, 1890.)

I desire to enter a plea for the child; to recall the almost forgotten fact that the supreme object of the child's education is the child himself. Organization and system are but means to an end. They form the machinery for running the schools, and within proper limits are a necessity. We are willing to concede to them all they can claim, when viewed from a business standpoint. "What is the machine good for?" finds its answer in the value of the product. The school must be organized on business principles, as a man organizes the forces in his store or his factory, in order that the labors of the teacher may be as productive as possible. In every school there must be a right order of studies, an orderly succession of steps in each study, and a rigid economy of time.

In addition, it must be granted that organization and system are very important aids in the formation of correct and exact habit of action, which is one of the main objects to be kept in mind, during the child's life at school. To be accustomed to follow a daily routine of work; to do certain things at fixed times; to be guided by the hands of the clock; to be trained to regularity and promptness; to allow neither time nor energy to run to waste through misdirected efforts, tends to fit the child for the struggles of business life.

The odds and ends, the products of the child's whims and notions, which are often woven together, or carefully tied up in a bundle, and labeled education, form no substantial foundation upon which to build a noble character. There must be direction, order, system, force, during the formative period of the child's life, if we expect them to appear in his mature years.

But organization and system have their limitations. The extremes of organization are seen in the school in one direction, when there is a conspicuous absence of any plan or method of procedure; and in the other direction, when the martinet predominates, and the children are robbed of their right to be children. The extremes of system are seen in the schools, in one direction, when a weak, uncertain, vacillating hand fails to control, or when a dull, plodding, sluggish brain fails to inspire and stimulate. In such conditions, laziness cloaks itself under the name of conservatism, and indolence clings to that which is old, simply because it has not life enough in its dry bones to investigate the claims of the new.

The extreme of system is seen in the other direction, when one mind dominates everything, traces every line, marks out every rut, and points out every

step. So many pages and no more, "must be done" this week; such explanations must be given at this step, and woe be to the teacher who gives any other. In such a system the three R's are no longer "Reading, 'Ritip' and 'Rithmetic," but Rules, Regulations, and Reports. No account is taken of the personal element in teaching. The right to assert oneself is denied both teacher and pupil. The whole process becomes simply a repetition of the children's game, "Follow your leader." The examination is made the line which separates the sheep from the goats; and the nervous, anxious child views its approach with about as much fear and trembling as one would the approach of the day of judgment. The results of the examination determine the character of the teacher, and the standing of the scholar. There is no appeal allowed from that tribunal. The despotism of "per cent." allows no rival.

This extreme elaboration of system gives us symmetry and uniformity, but it is at the expense of strength and growth. It promotes smoothness, prevents friction, attains exactness of detail, but it crushes out all life, energy, freshness and enthusiasm, and exalts itself to the chief place in the school. The child is absolutely forgotten in the worship and homage which is paid to the system.

The present tendency is in two directions. In our larger cities, where the press of public opinion is most felt, there is a very decided disposition to dethrone the system, and enthrone the school. In methods of instruction and discipline the teacher is accorded greater freedom of choice, and there is a corresponding increase in the respect which is due the individual rights of the pupil. On the other hand, I regret to say, in our smaller towns the machine seems to have taken a fresh lease of life; so that a school which has but six rooms will have as many grades, the same attenuated course of study, and as much machinery, as the schools of a large city.

It is not to be inferred by any means that organization and system are of necessity destructive of individuality on the part of teacher or pupil. This happens only when they pass beyond their true limitations. It is not freedom to teach, as much as it is freedom to grow; not freedom from restraint, but liberty to develop into a skilled workman through the inspiration of thought, which we desire for the teacher. If to attain it we must destroy some one's pet system, then let the system perish. In the midst of the responsibilities which the public are throwing upon the school, we are beginning to see the great need of having teachers who possess brains. But the machine has no conception of the need of brains. The system does not permit the use of brains. A brainy teacher is apt to make trouble for the system. The thinking, the planning is all done before the work comes to the teacher's hands. He must not question, he must acquiesce. We are often told that we must put the whole boy at school. The whole boy will not stay in school, unless he finds the whole teacher there to instruct him. The noblest type of American teacher, the only type worth having, is the teacher with brains.

While a little company of mourners were standing about the grave of Lucretia Mott, in solemn silence, as is the Quaker custom, a voice said: "Will no one say anything?" And another answered: "Who can speak? The preacher is dead." There was a whole sermon in those words. That which made her a power among men, which enabled her to sway the great audience by her simple words, as the grain is moved by the breeze, passed out of the world when she died.

Beyond and separate from this body, which is animate to-day and inanimate to-morrow, there is an energy, self-active, persistent, self-directive; an individuality through which man identifies himself; a force through which he approaches his ideal; a self-consciousness through which he comes ultimately to grasp his relations to himself, his fellow-man, and his Creator. It is inseparable from the man. It is the mystery of existence, the essence of immortality, the riddle of the soul. We come into the world alone, we dwell in it alone, we go out of it alone. Not until we face death can we comprehend what we mean by individuality. This individuality which is born with the child, which embraces not only the power to know, but the capability to feel and to will, which attends every step of his physical, mental, and moral growth, which is seen in every action, heard in every word, and felt in every heart-throb, is the one thing which we ought to respect in the child's education. It dawns upon the child first as existence, then as power, then as duty, then as determination. Some one expresses it: "I am, I can, I ought, I will"—the four most expressive words in the language. It is the key-note to the child's character. The scheme of education which does not take it into account is absolutely worthless.

Originality is of a lower degree than individuality. It is a coin which has its value, but it is of baser metal. Originality marks a man as peculiar in action, speech, or thought. It is not always a commendable trait in a teacher or pupil, and often needs to be rigidly restrained. There is nothing more domineering than originality in some of its forms. It is often only the outer manifestation of an inherited propensity. In the school-room, if it is accompanied with profound thought, it is a help; if it is only a personal eccentricity, it is a hinderance.

A man of intense individuality is usually a man of strong convictions; he is tenacious of purpose; his ideas are clear and sharp; his expressions leave no doubt as to his meaning. The character within looks out of the eyes, speaks in the voice, and manifests its strength and purpose in the whole bearing of the person. Thought is the only thing which makes a man self-reliant. The great teachers of the world have been thinkers. We cannot test their work by any system of examinations however skillfully devised; we cannot ascertain its true worth by apparent results. Results are exceedingly deceptive. We must know how they have been attained; how much time has been wasted; how much energy and strength have been dissipated; what faulty processes of instruction are covered up under the beautiful finish of the exterior, before we pronounce the results satisfactory.

It is one of the tricks of the system to throw the untrained teacher upon his own resources, and leave him to stand or fall by the results of his work as tested by the examination of his pupils. I hold that no teacher is fit for his place who is not fit to examine his own pupils, and to pass upon the character of his own work.

But I wish not to be misunderstood. Freedom is not license, originality is not eccentricity. Organization may be so wisely directed, and system built upon so broad a basis, as to be a help and not a hinderance. Rules and regulations may be so framed as to aid the teacher in his work. It is right that the teacher should know the wishes of those in authority, who are directly responsible to the people for the welfare of the schools. It is only when the rules and regulations leave nothing to the judgment of the teacher, and hold him responsible only along these narrow limits, that they are burdensome as fetters.

The system, as generally administered, takes no notice of environment, and yet the teacher who is alive to his work considers the environment, not of the school but of the individual scholar. "How came that boy here?" asked a city superintendent of a teacher; "I suspended him yesterday." "I know it," she answered; "and I took him back this morning." "But that is against the rules." "I know that, but last night I visited his home, and I pity him more than I blame him. If you want to suspend him again you can, but I won't." The superintendent was wise enough to suspend the rules instead of the boy.

Originality, to be a help, must be original, natural. Originality which is studied, which degenerates into oddities, which is made a matter of pride, is only a hinderance to the teacher. It is contagious, and great harm comes to the pupil through imitation. A man cannot safely make a fool of himself before children. The same is true of his individuality: it may be a source of irretrievable injury to the school. Unless there is behind it, and shining through it, a moral earnestness, an undisguised honesty of purpose, an open uprightness of action, a man of strong individuality is the most dangerous man whom we can put in charge of a school.

We have already said that the welfare, the growth, the development of the child is the object of the school. The process of education is very largely the action of mind upon mind; the influence of the superior upon the inferior; of an intellect mature and strong upon one immature and weak. The individuality of the teacher seeks to know, to permeate, to encompass the individuality of the pupil. Whatever comes between the teacher and the pupil, whatever tends to thwart, to divert, to limit this exchange of thought, works an injury beyond remedy. When mind acts upon mind, then education renders education necessary.

Entire, absolute, essential freedom in thinking, in choosing, in acting, is necessary to success in teaching. But this freedom embraces the taught as well as the teacher. The teacher must not deny to his pupil that freedom

which he claims for himself. He must be a master of principles, and not of methods only, so that his individuality may not overshadow, but rather stimulate, the individuality of the child. A man should always claim the right to interpret his own thoughts, motives, and purposes. He should allow no one to do it for him. The child must be encouraged to attempt the same thing; this alone will awaken in him a consciousness of his own resources. Life forces knowledge upon every man. The idiot is the only ignorant man.

It is an error in the system that it takes note, to so large a degree, of book knowledge in its courses of study. Knowledge derived from books is of great value; but it must be made subordinate to that fuller knowledge, which is written in a book of which each day is a page, every year a chapter, and life itself the complete volume. The educating power of life is always at our disposal.

We sometimes speak of teaching the child to think. It is as natural for a child to think as it is for a tree to grow. It is not the part of the teacher to wake up mind, but to avoid putting it to sleep; it is not to administer stimulants, but to avoid administering narcotics. Give the child the same freedom to think and observe that the street Arab has in his games, only guide him with skill; throw off the swaddling-bands in which the system would swathe him; take advantage of his curiosity and wonder; take advantage also of what he already knows, and do not attempt to teach over again what he has already learned without your aid, and he will startle you by his progress, and by the readiness with which he will profit under your instruction.

There is no place in which the individuality of the teaching can so make itself felt, and in which the individuality of the child is so thoroughly alive, as in the primary room. And yet the first thing the primary teacher is required to do in many schools is to crush the individuality of the child; to put him into a strait-jacket which the system has provided. The teacher is not to blame—the child's individuality is in the way; to strengthen it forms no part of the criterion by which her work is to be judged; it is useless as long as it cannot be graded by a certain per cent.

The system should be broad enough to let the individuality of the teacher act through the individuality of the child, to develop moral intuitions; to cultivate the virtues; to strengthen the will; to render him strong and vigorous in thought, noble in purpose, hardy in action, and ready—when school-life is finished—to begin the work of educating himself.

Again, the system places too much stress upon examinations as showing the literary qualifications of the teacher, and his consequent fitness for his work. It is necessary that the teacher possess knowledge of the branches which he is to teach; but our schools are filled with teachers whose only qualification is knowledge. The examination tests knowledge, and having attained a certain per cent., the teacher considers his calling and election sure. Consequently, candidates burden themselves with facts; they know certain things, but they have no conception of the truths which have their roots in things. Facts may

be buried under such a mass of rubbish as to lose their germinating power. I believe that persistent study and mastery of one branch will fit a person to teach any branch in which he would take the pains to prepare his work. These are some of the things which we ought to know regarding a candidate: "Under whose care have you studied?" "What books are your favorites?" "Can you express yourself in clear, vigorous language?" "Can you govern by force of will?" "Can you awaken enthusiasm in the school?" "Can you inspire the pupils with the determination to do right, to lead virtuous lives, to be honest, God-fearing citizens?" "Can you make the individuality of yourself, of the pupils, a power in your school?" The tendency of the system to ignore such questions, and to be guided entirely by the number of questions answered correctly in each branch, and to repeat the operation year after year, relentlessly, and without mercy, is evil and only evil continually. The technical examination repeated again and again, degrades teaching to the level of a trade, and helps the ignorant teacher to conceal his ignorance.

I do not object to the rigid examination in the case of young teachers. But when that is once passed, the only conditions imposed upon the teacher should be enthusiasm, life, and growth. When these are absent, the teacher is dead.

In the anti-slavery days, when Dr. Bailey was establishing the *National Era*, Chief Justice Chase, then a young man, wrote to him proposing to join the little band of Abolitionists in Washington. Bailey replied to him: "Bring freedom with you; we want individualism." So I would say to every young teacher, as you enter your work: "Bring more than knowledge; bring freedom with you—we want individualism in the school-room." The system greatly errs in that it takes cognizance of that which can be seen and heard, but not of that which can be felt. As flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, so the mere possession of knowledge does not entitle one to any part in the inheritance of noble teachers. Scholarly teachers ought to be the most successful; they always are, when scholarship leads onward and upward. But height of intellectual stature alone does not enable a teacher to walk as Saul among his brethren.

Knowledge, to be of any value to the teacher, must become a permanent, increasing, living force in his work and character. Knowledge which is non-productive is dead. It has neither comeliness nor beauty that men should desire it. Knowledge which is alive, which strengthens the memory, which guides the judgment, which enlightens the reason, which fortifies the will—this is the knowledge which, acting through his individuality, makes the teacher a power in the school.

The most practical thing in life is intense action. The most practical education is that which awakens the latent forces; which brings out that which is within; which puts the child in complete possession of himself, and gives him such mastery of his own powers and faculties, that whether he holds the plow, or shoves the plane, or smites the anvil, or wields the pen, he shall feel that there is no impassable barrier between him and the highest work which

he knows he is capable of doing. The oak and the elm grow side by side; they derive their nourishment from the same soil; they are warmed by the same sunshine, the same dew and rain fall upon each alike; yet the elm rejoices in its beauty, and the oak is proud of its strength. The individuality of the one in no way detracts from the individuality of the other. There is the same perpetual difference between children. One is gifted in one direction, and one in another; one has the voice of the singer, another the eye of the painter, and another the touch of the sculptor. Nature has endowed one with the taste of the student; another has in embryo the habits of the business man. It is the law of inheritance—"that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit." There must be law and system; but law must be administered in the interests of freedom, and system must be reduced to the position of a servant, whose purpose is to develop the individuality of the child, "each after its own kind."

As long as the world lasts; as long as there are those who teach and those who are taught; as long as there is anything to learn, there will be one immutable law for all times and conditions. The Creator has given to every mind its own model, after the likeness of which it must be left free to develop. Ruskin says: "God has made every man fit for his place. Neither the artist nor the student, so far from being able to do the other's work, can even comprehend the way in which it is done." The highest work of the teacher is to aid the pupil in his attempts to build for himself; to aid him as he tries to make the rough places smooth, the crooked places straight; to aid him in his efforts to throw up a highway, whereon the youth may march to that royalty of manhood to which he was ordained of God when he was born into the flesh.

DISCUSSION.

CHARLES W. BARDEEN, of Syracuse, New York: I cannot quarrel with my friend Mr. Sabin. I have known him longer than I have known any other person in this Association. My chum in college knew him, and thought he was the best teacher he ever knew. As I have followed his work out West, I have come to the conclusion that when he expresses an opinion it is safer to follow it than to fight it. And so, as I cannot quarrel with him, I will quarrel with his title. It is *Organization and System versus Originality*. It reminds me of the old question: "Will you have meat, or bread?" But why bread *or* meat? Why not bread *and* meat? What we need most is system *and* individuality. Not quite so much individuality as Mr. Sabin wants. Our schools are for the bestowal of the greatest good to the greatest number; and that can exist only when there is harmony throughout. If, as superintendent of a school, I had suspended a boy, and if, without consulting me, the teacher had assumed to restore him, that teacher would go, or I would. No

benefit to the individual pupil would atone for the injury to the school from such a conflict of authority.

When I am about half through with what I want to say, your President will strike his gavel and I shall have to sit down. You will be great losers. It would be better in my case if no time had been fixed, I know. But from what a flood of oratory that gavel has saved you in the case of these other fellows! Therefore I must rejoice that our individuality is subordinate to a system.

Take the pupil's work: In what kind of work is individuality most important? Beyond any question, in literary work. The style is the smack of individuality in the writer, the difference between the way he says a thing and the way somebody else would say it. And it is about all there is of literary work. Shall there then be no system in teaching literary work? Shall we teach a child not to express himself oddly but to express himself first as truly, then as clearly and then as strongly as possible? Truth first, then clearness, then strength; these are the ideals. The pupil is to be encouraged in his particular expression only when his particular expression is the best. Now to know which is the best, he must be instructed in a system of literary work that has come down to us from Aristotle and Cicero, rules of rhetoric which are as sound to-day as when they were written. If then he can render himself in the flow of his fancy so as to give it vividness and originality, he will enjoy that freedom which rests upon proficiency. There is a freedom based on ignorance, too indolent to become proficient, too stupid to desire proficiency. If the young teacher should come to me and complain that her individuality had not sufficient scope, that she was restrained and hampered by a too-rigid course of study, I should ask her, "How well do you do this too-narrow work? Laying aside for the moment, considerations of the great things you might do under different conditions, how well do you do the little you are required to do under the present condition?" In my experience it is the unsuccessful teacher that complains of environments. There are thousands of teachers in this country, perhaps especially in this great West, capable of living and acting beyond their work, and hundreds of those teachers are every year promoted to higher work. They have demonstrated their fitness by doing their low-grade work well, not by complaining that nobody could do it well.

Twenty years ago teachers were urged by noble self-sacrifice to do their duty under the thought that their profession was second only to that of the college instructor. To-day, backed by some educational journals, they are exhorted not to work too hard—to go fishing, go on vacations, and not allow anxiety for their work to overcome them; they are to take things easy. You know the story of the woman who took her son to a man who had advertised for an errand-boy. After some questions he said, "Well, Patsey, the trouble I have had with errand-boys was that they did not attend to business. Do you suppose if I send you a mile on an errand you will go straight there and

straight back and bring me an answer within an hour?" Here the mother interfered: "Come on, Patsey," she said; "he don't want an errand-boy: he wants a cherubim." When I read some of these articles in some of the educational journals I begin to think that if you ask a teacher to do honest work and reasonable service, he will think you are looking for a cherubim. I know that it is not so generally; I know there is no better work done anywhere than by the American teachers; but the tendency of thought sometimes is that way, and I should like to see it in the other direction.

Two years ago the Emperor of Germany and the King of Saxony were present when the public-school teachers and children were drawn up in two lines. As I looked at those German teachers, paid officials in the government, office-holders, subordinates, in positions fixed for life, in a line where promotion was slow and possibilities narrow, I realized as I had never realized before, the advantages which the American teachers enjoy and should appreciate. Individuality hampered? Why, this Association is hungry for a new thought whenever it may be advanced by any American teacher. Originality is given the widest scope in every city and every State. Superintendents are traveling over the land to find teachers with ideas of their own. Possibilities limited? There never was so little limit to possibilities and to positions and to responsibilities and to salaries for teachers who have demonstrated their fitness for the high position which they are called upon to fill.

I wish to say to complaining teachers, put your heart and soul and mind and strength into your work as it is; and if it is too narrow for you, be very sure that a broader road will open up soon.

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